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ABSTRACT

A field experiment tested different reporting and writing techniques against standard practice. The underlying purpose of the project was to explore whether new techniques of writing might make the news more interesting to those who are "aliterate" (they can read but do not read). On each of four days, four reporters reported and wrote the same news story in four different modes (traditional, narrative, radical clarity, and point of view). A different version appeared in each of four contiguous circulation zones each day followed by a telephone survey of readers to measure effects of the treatments. To obtain a larger representation of younger, less educated, less loyal-to-newspaper readers, 210 adult students at an area vocational-training school read packets of news stories (including the treatment stories) and completed surveys similar to the telephone surveys. Results indicated that: (1) traditional stories did not seem to justify their predominance; (2) traditional stories scored well on the "quality" variable; (3) the biggest overall success story among the modes was the narrative form but it failed to get readers involved in issues; (4) radical clarity did not produce many outstanding positive or negative results; (5) the poorest performance was registered by the point of view mode; and (6) the paths from the dependent variable "reading" to the dependent variable "knowledge" were dramatically different for each of the writing modes. Findings suggest that the writing style of a news story does make a difference, and that editors should consider creative combinations of writing styles. (Five tables of data and a figure representing the path analysis are included; sample stories for each of the four modes are attached.) (RS)

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Combatting Aliteracy with New Modes of Newswriting: A Field Experiment

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Combatting Aliteracy with New Modes of Newswriting: A Field Experiment:*

Most newspaper journalists know of Thomas Jefferson's belief about the importance of the press to democracy: "Were it left to me to to decide whether we should have a government without newspaper or newspaper without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Less well known is the rest of Jefferson's statement: "But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them" (Hirsch, 1987).

In most respects, American newspapers today are better than anyone could have dreamed 200 years ago, and they are available almost anywhere in the country. Still, they are falling short of the Jeffersonian ideal, as journalism seems to be just beyond the grasp of many Americans.

Of the many reasons -- busy modern lifestyles, the crush of time, the lure of television and entertainment media, apathy -- the one most within the control of journalists may well be the most intimate: the connection between their words and their readers' understanding and interest. The purpose of this project is to explore ways to make newspaper reporting and writing more appealing, comprehensible and involving for a wider rang of readers.

Conventional wisdom, fed by some ideologues, would have a great percentage of Americans "illiterate" and therefore second-class citizens, inferior to or even victims of the "literate" elite. In fact, only a few people are utterly illiterate -- fewer than 5 percent of young

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people, according to the most comprehensive national study, conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress (Kirsch & Jungeblut, 1986). Many of those are non-native speakers of English, and others have cognitive difficulties. "Based on the standard of 'literacy' of a hundred years ago, the ability to sign one's name, virtually all young adults are 'literate,'" the report said. "If the standard of the World War II era, some 50 years ago, is applied, almost 95 percent of young adults are estimated to meet or exceed the performance of fourth-grade students. Based on the standard of the War on Poverty, 25 years ago, 80 percent of young adults meet or exceed the performance of students in the eighth grade."

In his history of literacy, Kaestle (1991) points to research showing that fewer than 1 percent of Americans in 1979 said they consider themselves illiterate, compared to 20 percent in 1870. More to the point, Kaestle writes, "Readers can be divided into an underclass of functional illiterates, poorly educated and uninformed; an aliterate group, who can read but don't . . . and a reading elite, well informed and, when in positions of power, capable of manipulating news and cultural symbols and slogans to their own ends."

Literacy therefore is not a dichotomy but rather a continuum, ranging from facile readers to struggling decoders. And reading is more than looking at words and knowing their definitions. It requires an arsenal of skills and knowledge, background information, reasoning and understandings of how people and society function. It involves not only a capacity to comprehend but the motivation to place the written material into a context that is meaningful for oneself. The National Assessment research (of 21-to-25-year-olds, being repeated for all adults in 1993) found that, while the overwhelming majority were able to read simple material, many fewer were able to get through moderately difficult text, and only a few could handle the most complex tasks. The falloff was particularly severe for minorities, especially African-Americans, and for those who stop their education early.

The NAEP concluded that illiteracy is not a major problem, but literacy is. While 96 percent of young people could retrieve a simple fact from a six-paragraph news story, only about 21 percent (25

percent of whites, 3 percent of African-Americans, 12 percent of Hispanics) could summarize the main argument from a Tom Wicker column. The sharpest falloff was at the intermediate point between locating information in a news article (56 percent: 63 percent of whites, 24 percent of African-Americans) and orally interpreting a lengthy feature story (37 percent: 43 percent of whites and 11 percent of blacks).

Any of these young people can read the kind of soup on a label, but very few of them can figure the unit price or comprehend the nutrition information. And the socially important, informational and analytic parts of newspapers are beyond a great many of them. If one has to struggle to understand today's awkward, expensive, inky, time-consuming newspapers, how long will they even try?

Postman (1985) points out that reading and writing require the sensitive, painstaking transfer of meaning:

> A written sentence calls upon its author to say something, upon its reader to know the import of what is said. And when an author and reader are struggling with semantic meaning, they are engaged in the most serious challenge to the intellect . . . The reader must come armed, in a serious state of intellectual readiness. This is not easy because he comes to the text alone. In reading, one's responses are isolated, one's intellect thrown back on its own resources.

When that fragile, volatile encounter involves reading the newspaper, so much more comes to bear. In addition to the external pressures --- such as time, cost and family and electronic distractions -- the reader too often is asked to work through pervasive journalism techniques and assumptions that seem to complicate the struggle. There are, for example, such newswriting conventions as the inverted-pyramid style, block paragraphs, artificial transitions, choppy sentences and paragraphs, and organization for production

convenience. Green (1979) dissected an Associated Press news story from the perspective of a reading analyst, then rewrote the story in narratives that might be used by a sociologist, a participant in the news and the reporter telling the story at home. While the inverted-pyramid style may help newspaper skimming, Green concluded that it also is a major contributor to the disorganization of newsriting and, therefore, a deterrent to reading. She evaluated other conventions of newswriting and concluded that "the 'script' for writing news stories ought to be overhauled," de-emphasizing editors' convenience and traditional readability assumptions in favor of literary and language techniques that serve comprehensibility.

Some critics have argued that newswriting merely needs to be simplified. McAdams (1987) studied whether readership and comprehension of news stories depended on readability measures (Fog indexes), but found they did not. However, there was a relationship she called "startling . . . If readers judged a story topic 'interesting,' they also perceived the story to be of high quality overall, regardless of measured readability." That seems to support the complexity of reading: Readers will work harder to get through stories if they somehow maintain their interest, through style or subject matter.

Another dimension is the background knowledge and understanding that the reader brings to the story -- what E.D. Hirsch (1987) called "cultural literacy." He argued that, increasingly, many people do not read because they do not have the "world knowledge" (cultural literacy) or "network of information that all competent readers possess." That is not to say that readers are ignorant. But increasingly, what they know is narrow, limited to their own generation or experience. And the shared knowledge -- which newspapers assume of their readers -- grows increasingly complex and technical. When a reader picks up a newspaper and constantly collides with alien terms without which the stories have little meaning, it becomes even easier to turn on the television.

Others have made similar points about the average American's knowledge of science (Trefil, 1990) and economics (National Survey, 1992). Considering that many people do not know what ozone is, where Bosnia is or what the Dow Jones average means, suddenly it is

easier to understand why such a reader would find the newspaper incomprehensible, as if it were in another language.

Into the midst of all these obstacles and complications, to a readership that is losing interest and patience, many newspaper journalists write their stories much as they always have. The purpose of this research project is to explore new techniques of newswriting, to see whether the news can be made more interesting, more accessible and more comprehensible.

The specific goal of this field experiment was to test different reporting and writing techniques against current standard practice. Previous experimental work in this area has relied most often on laboratory settings, often using artificially fabricated news stories and a small number of university students as subjects. The project tested writing techniques under natural conditions: actual news stories written by newspaper staff writers, published on deadline in the regular editions of the *St. Petersburg Times*. It measured the effects of the treatment among readers who were not recruited or cued for the experiment and who did not know the questions they were asked were part of an experiment.

The four story techniques were developed for this project by Don Fry, director of writing programs, and Roy Peter Clark, dean of the faculty (on leave), of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. The techniques were chosen, in consultation with the entire research team, beecause they are substantially different from each other, because they already appear in some forms in newspapers today, and because they seemed adaptable to different kinds of news. They are discussed more fully by Fry and Clark in the report of this project to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Literacy Committee, 1993). Both Fry and Clark participated in the design, execution and evaluation of the project. The four modes chosen for the experiment differ according to structure, degree of "showing" (versus "telling"), levels of explanation and definition, narrative content and treatment of quotations.

These, then, are the four modes of newswriting used in the experiment:

Traditional. The first technique is the most familiar to newspaper journalists, and it served a control function in much of the analysis. It is based on the inverted pyramid, growing out of the journalism tradition that valued facts above all, and in accordance with the early technologicial requirements of the telegraph (Hohenberg, 1969). This form suits production needs well. The reporter writes a compelling lead and arranges subsequent material in descending order of importance. The story can be shortened simply by deleting the requisite number of lines or paragraphs from the bottom. The tone stays neutral, with more telling than showing. The basic conservatism and frantic pace of the news business, Fry and Clark have argued, keep journalists from enlarging this basic repertoire of forms, and as a result they are "boring and confusing readers, and driving them away." Reporters tend to run out of interest, energy and time halfway down, so they write the second half casually at best, poorly at worst. From the reader's point of view, the story probably becomes less interesting as he or she reads on, yet because reporters typically place background or context in the second half, the reader without that background cannot fully understand the top of the story. Reporters also generally assume more knowledge than readers possess. Hence, Fry and Clark conclude, it is mostly journalists and their sources who fully understand inverted-pyramid news stories.

Narrative. This mode tells a story, with actions performed by characters in time sequences, including some chronological telling. As in the oral tradition of storytelling, each story has a beginning, middle and end. Actions and speeches reveal motives to the fullest extent possible, and quotations retain characteristics of actual speech. The Narrative mode reveals information mostly by showing, with a little telling to frame the news context. It is probably the mode of extended discourse learned first and it provides familiar expectations to the widest range of the population (Mandler, 1984).

Radical Clarity. This mode arranges material in an order that maximizes reader understanding and explains whatever the reader might need explained. Background and context appear early to orient the reader immediately, and the second person can be used, addressing the reader directly. This mode defines terms often and

explains motives explicitly, leaving little need for reading between the lines. Thus the mode attempts seriously to "take the reader's point of view" (Dervin, 1989) by shaping the story to his or her needs and interests, although this approach is hampered by the necessity of making one story fit all needs and interests.

Point of View. This mode tells the story with a viewpoint that is immediately clear to the reader. Its tone ventures just short of the normative line between straight news and editorializing. The story uses any shape other than the inverted pyramid, because it must have a forceful ending that leaves the reader with the writer's central point. Like radical clarity, this mode can use the second person. The story attempts to persuade by showing rather than telling.

(For an example of stories written in each mode, please see Appendix A.)

The three experimental modes are not innovations or radical departures; they have been used, partially and in limited contexts, for many years. In the experiment, however, they were used in full-story form and in competition with each other, to test their relative powers.

Before any further discussion of the experiment, some explication of the dependent variables is in order. What does it mean to say one writing mode "works better" or "gets through to readers better" than another? The purpose of the study is to explore means of engaging readers -- not just to shore up circulation figures in the aggregate but, from a broader societal perspective, to enable citizens to make informed decisions in their everyday lives and to become involved in the issues and activities of their communities. Thus the impact of a "successful" news story is not only short-term success for a newspaper but long-term viability for newspapers as an institution in society. Therefore the "success" of a treatment mode should have more dimensions than simply how much of the story was read. Also of importance is whether the story induces the reader to think about or act upon the subject matter in the story (this dimension later became the Involvement variable), whether the reader feels positive affect toward the story (the Quality variable), and whether the reader learns from the story (the Knowledge variable). The methods of creating the four dependent variables will be discussed below in more detail.

Five hypotheses regarding main effects were stipulated:

H1: Knowledge scores will be highest for the Radical Clarity mode.

H2: Involvement measures will be highest for the Narrative and Point of View modes.

H3: Quality measures will be highest for the Traditional mode and lowest for the Point of View mode (both being reflections of what readers are used to and therefore deem proper for a news story).

H4: For Reading, the Narrative mode will score highest, with Traditional scoring lowest.

H5: In the aggregate, Traditional will score no better than any of the alternative modes.

An additional hypothesis was ventured as to interaction effects:

H6: Younger, less educated and less-frequent newspaper readers will produce higher scores generally with the Narrative and Radical Clarity modes and lower scores with the Traditional mode.

I. Design and Methodology

The experiment itself was conducted in January 1993 in St. Petersburg, Fla, with the cooperation of the management and staff of the *St. Petersburg Times*, Pinellas County's largest morning paper. On each of four days, four reporters reported and wrote the same news story in four different modes. Because the newspaper publishes different, zoned editions of its local-news section, a different version (using a different writing mode) appeared in each of four contiguous circulation zones each day. Each version appeared prominently, over the fold on the front page of the local section, with identical photographs or other graphics, identical headlines and identical "subheds." The stories were all written to the same length, and all four stories "jumped" to the same spot each day inside the section.

To control for the potentially biasing effects of individual reporters' talents, or of the nature of the readership in particular circulation zones, two rotational sequences were adopted: The reporters rotated through all four writing modes and zones over the

four days, and each zone received a different mode each day, so that each ultimately received all four modes.

The four reporters and the city editor brainstormed story ideas, looking for subjects that would interest readers equally in all four zones. The intent was to select ordinary news stories found typically in the local-news sections of most daily newspapers -- not the splashy, reader-grabbing stories usually found leading the front section. Because the complex logistics of the zoning demanded earlier-than-usual deadlines, late-breaking stories were avoided, although each of the stories was a typical "one-day" story (reporting events that occurred within the 24 hours prior to publication). The first day's story described the practice of returning gift pets after the holidays; it appeared with an appealing photo of a dog in the city pound. The second day's story concerned the extension of a recreation trail (for bikers, skaters and pedestrians) from outlying county areas into St. Petersburg; it appeared with map of the projected route and a photo of the existing trail. The third day's story covered a proposed new campus for the county's community college system. The fourth day's story concerned the county commission's rejection of a proposal to build a marina. Both stories appeared with photos.

The news team pooled reporting tasks and shared basic information. They filled each other in on contexts and background, and shared quotes that might seem more suitable in other writing modes. The researchers and writing coaches often stood by observing, but neither group composed or changed any of the content of the stories. Both researchers and journalists took pains to ensure that none of the experimental treatments compromised the normal journalistic standards of the newspaper.

Each night after the stories appeared, a telephone survey of readers was conducted to measure effects of the treatments. To ensure equal representation from each of the four zones (and therefore each of the four treatment modes), the overall sample was designed by cluster, with clusters of equal size within each zone. Within each cluster (defined as a newspaper carrier route) a probability sample was taken from the newspaper's subscriber lists.

(Greater validity would be achieved by surveying non-subscribers as well as subscribers, but the logistical problems and expense of locating a substantial number of non-subscribers who had read the treatment stories on that day, proved insurmountable.) The daily sample size ranged from 217 to 250 (approximately 55 completed surveys for each treatment mode each day) over the four days.

Respondents were not recruited or cued before the interview; their responses were based only on their recollection of what they had read that morning. They were screened as to whether they had read the treatment story. If they had not, the interview was terminated; if they had, the schedule was completed. Thus the response rate was around 50 percent each night, despite the generally accommodating nature of most respondents.

All four dependent variables' scores have been standardized to range between -1 and +1, with the group mean at zero.

The Reading variable is a measure of whether the reader read the first few paragraphs of the treatment story, more than the first few paragraphs, or most or all of it (interviews were terminated for those who had read only the headline or the lead sentence).

The Involvement and Quality measures are the results of a factor analysis of several items in the questionnaire (see Table 1 for a summary of the items' correlations). Four items, measured on a scale of 1 to 10, comprised the Involvement factor: "How much did you care about what happened in the article?" "How much did you connect the article to other issues or your own experiences?" "How much did reading this article make you want to find out more about issues like this?" and "How much did reading this article make you want to get more directly involved in issues like this?" Two items, also on the 1-10 scale, comprised the Quality variable: "How would you rate how well the (treatment) article was written?" and "On the same scale, how balanced and accurate was the writing for this article?" It is worth noting that each group of items was not correlated with the other; that is, readers could feel "involved" by a story without necessarily rating it high in quality, and vice-versa.

The Knowledge variable is a composite score from the four responses each reader gave to true-or-false questions related to basic

factual information contained in all four versions of any story. The higher the number of correct responses, the higher the standardized score.

In addition to the writing modes, several important independent variables were included: age, gender, education and readership habits. Of particular interest to aliteracy studies, of course, are the lower-end subgroups among age, education and readership habits. Age was trichotomized at ages 30 and 64; education was divided into less than high school, high school diploma only, and more than high school. Readership was trichotomized into newspaper use three days a week or fewer, four to six days a week, and seven days a week.

Because the demographics of Pinellas County, Fla., assured high proportions of older, well-educated persons who tended to read the paper almost every day, a second sampling procedure was used, to obtain a larger representation of younger, less educated, less loyal-to-newspaper readers. A week after the cross-sectional survey was completed, 210 adult students at an area vocational-training school were recruited and each given a package of the four local news sections from the field experiment, systematically shuffled to ensure even representation of all four modes. They were given 30 minutes to read as much of the four sections as they wanted; they were not prompted to read the treatment stories. They responded to the same items as in the telephone survey, only in writing. Eventually the data sets from the technical college and the cross-sectional survey were combined. While the combination obviously compromises the totally natural setting for newspaper readership, and complicates the statistical handling of some of the findings, it was deemed essential to the larger goals of the project to obtain an adequate sample of the population of greatest theoretical interest. It is important to note, however, that in the overall Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), the variation of results due to the difference between the two survey methods is controlled as a covariate.

II. Findings

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 summarize the results in ways that allow comparisons of mean scores across the four writing modes, as well as across the four dependent variables. Unlike a laboratory setting in which subjects are asked to read the treatment material without distraction and respond to questions immediately afterward, and in which the researchers ensure extreme differences among the treatments, these subjects were asked about articles they had read in a natural setting -- articles in real local-news sections written by real reporters whose editors would not tolerate extremes in writing styles. Hence the differences in effects of treatment modes were not as stark as social researchers are often accustomed to viewing. Especially after controlling for the independent variables of gender, age, education and readership habits, the size of some cells precluded achieving statistical significance at p levels of less than .05, even when a substantial difference was visible. Therefore the authors adopted a less rigid standard used at times in exploratory work such as this. If a score deviated from its group mean by more than 5 percent of the possible variation for that dependent variable, then it was deemed a "substantial" difference. The substantial results appear with asterisks in the tables.

Despite the lack of robustness of results under a more traditional definition, a good number of suggestive results did emerge from the data. The first finding is that the traditional stories did not seem to justify their predominance in today's newspapers. In each table, the bottom two rows summarize the relative successes and failures of each writing mode for the various subgroups of control variables. They represent, respectively, how many times each mode scored substantially higher or lower than the mean for that subgroup's row. In the Reading variable (Table 2), the Traditional mode did poorly with five different groups: males, young readers, middle-aged readers, readers with less than high school educations, and readers four to six days a week. The Traditional mode recovers somewhat for the other variables, but its net sum of successes and failures is zero.

Women gave the Traditional stories the highest Quality evaluations (Table 4) but did not learn as much from them as they did from the other modes (Table 5). The best educated and most loyal readers seemed to believe the Traditional stories had higher quality (Table 4), perhaps because they are accustomed to them and best equipped to decipher them. The Traditional mode was least effective at pulling readers into the story beyond the first few paragraphs (Table 2).

Thus Hypothesis 5 is basically supported; Traditional did relatively poorly overall. The results also support Hypothesis 3, in that Traditional scored well on the Quality variable. As for Hypothesis 6, that Traditional would fare poorly with younger, less educated, less frequent readers, the results were mixed. Younger readers did not read deeply or learn well from Traditional stories, but they rated them high in Quality. The least-educated readers likewise did not read much or learn well from the Traditional mode. Infrequent readers, however, felt more involved and rated Quality high for this mode.

The biggest overall success story among the modes was the Narrative form. Its net sum of high-versus-low (asterisked) results from Tables 2-5 was +8. Men read more of these stories than they did other techniques (Table 2), though they did not feel "involved" by these stories (Table 3). Young and middle-aged readers read more of these stories (Table 2), and the youngest group learned best from them (Table 5). High-school graduates (with no college) thought narrative stories the highest quality (Table 4) and got them most involved (Table 3), although that disappeared with people educated beyond high school. While infrequent readers learned the best with narratives (Table 5), frequent readers had trouble connecting with them (Table 3). The Narrative technique was most effective at pulling readers into the story (Table 2).

As for the other hypotheses, the data did not support Hypothesis 2 -- quite the opposite. The Narrative mode, for all its strength in keeping readers reading (supporting Hypothesis 4), failed to get readers involved in issues.

Radical Clarity did not produce many outstanding positive or negative results, with only three successes among the various subgroups and only two failures. Young readers did not think this mode was high-quality journalism (Table 4), but they said it connected with them -- got them involved (Table 3). The least-educated readers read more of the Radical Clarity stories (Table 2) and gave them the best Quality ratings (Table 4). But those same readers, as well as infrequent readers, said these stories did not get them involved.

Radical Clarity was deafeningly silent in terms of Hypothesis 1. None of the subgroups learned substantially more or less from this mode than from the others. As for Hypothesis 6, Radical Clarity did get young readers and least-educated readers into the stories, but young readers and infrequent readers did not rate this mode high on Quality, and the least educated and infrequent readers did not feel involved by Radical Clarity.

The poorest performance was registered by the Point of View mode, primarily because of the abysmal reactions it got for the Quality variable. Point of View scores were substantially lower among eight of the eleven subgroups in the Quality table (Table 4). While men rated this mode highest on learning (Table 5) and involvement (Table 3), they said they did not read as much of those stories (Table 2) and rated them low in quality (Table 4).

However, even Point of View has its uses. In support of Hypothesis 2, the only overall successful performance for Point of View was in making readers feel involved. Hypothesis 3 was endorsed, with the uniform dislike for the Quality of this mode. And in opposition to Hypothesis 6, Point of View failed to win positive reactions from young, less educated or infrequent readers -- with two exceptions. The least-educated readers learned best from and felt more involved by Point of View.

One of the most interesting and significant differences in terms of effects upon readers has emerged through a path analysis from the dependent variable Reading to the dependent variable Knowledge. The paths are dramatically different for each of the writing modes

(please see Figure 1). The strengths of the influences among the four dependent variables are derived from a regression analysis of the variables after controlling for all antecedent (independent) variables. With the Traditional mode, readers had to believe a story was of high quality before they would learn from it. With the Narrative technique, some readers learned through their high evaluations of quality, but others learned the information directly by reading the story without any notion of positive evaluation. With Radical Clarity, quality judgments had little to do with learning; reading alone or caring about the content (Involvement) led to learning. With Point of View, readers achieved knowledge only if they believed the story to be of high quality or if they became involved in the subject matter.

From Figure 1 one might conclude that the Narrative technique performed best in generating learning from the stories. With Narrative, there are two paths to knowledge, and one of them is direct, from simply reading the story. With Traditional and Radical Clarity, there is only one path, and with Point of View both paths are indirect, requiring positive evaluation of either quality or involvement before learning is achieved.

Another way of analyzing the diagram is by the goal of the story. For example, if the reporter wants to make the reader care and do something about the subject, Radical Clarity is not the best technique. But if the reporter simply wants to communicate information and if the Narrative mode is inappropriate, a Radical Clarity approach would work best.

III. Conclusions

First, it must be acknowledged that the writing/reading relationship is only one of several important factors in drawing a reader into a newspaper article. Much depends on the external conditions -- such as time scarcity -- under which a person will pick up a newspaper. Even then, the writing style is not paramount. There is the visual presentation and, perhaps more important, the subject matter itself. Dull, disorganized writing will not deter readers from a

story about a fascinating subject, and the best writing will not interest everyone in the report from an inconsequential meeting of the local zoning board.

However, the results in these data indicate that the writing does make a difference. None of the techniques was clearly superior at all times for everyone. Each of the techniques worked best for some people and some stories in some ways. In a number of areas, the results seem almost contradictory. While a reader might read more of one technique, he or she might learn better from another, consider another to be of higher quality and become more involved from still another technique. This reality complicates the job of the editor or reporter, who might select a particular technique based not only on the subject matter, but also on whether the story primarily seeks to induce readership, convey substantial information, entertain the reader or move the reader to action.

The findings should encourage editors to consider creative combinations. For example, one might use a storytelling technique to capture the reader's interest, then add a "radically clear" sidebar to communicate hard information on the subject. Or, to snag scanners, an editor might present a hard summary box, so the reader of a narrative story will not be frustrated in a search for an early "nut graph" summary of the essence of the story. As Fry and Clark suggested after the completion of this study, editors should encourage storytelling as a frequent component in news stories, even if the Narrative mode is not adopted *in toto*. The Narrative form seems to keep readers and impart information as well. Likewise, editors and reporters might think more often in terms of radical clarity -- not for the entire story, which can become a boring form of outline, but for portions of stories and sidebars.

Obviously, there are no easy answers as to how newspapers can reach the aliterate. But research such as this, involving real readers and reporters, presents provocative, if complex, results. The logistics of this type of experiment are challenging, and the degree of newspaper cooperation required is not easy to come by, but we hope to see more real-time field studies nonetheless.

Much more research is needed. Similar experiments could test some of the less orthodox techniques under discussion in the newspaper research literature (e.g., Farnan, 1992). This project was behavioral -- merely descriptive of how readers respond to four reporting and writing styles. Future research should be more analytical and prescriptive, seeking understandings of why readers function as they do and how reporters and editors might consider the science, as well as the art, of writing. At that point, newspaper journalism can benefit from the knowledgee of text and language comprehension developed in other fields (e.g., Gernbacher, 1990).

At the very least, this unusual experiment indicates that writing style deserves a place in the mix of factors that can bring marginal readers and newspapers together. No single style emerged as superior for that purpose; that is as expected, and that is as it should be. But this much is clear: In their search for tomorrow's readership, editors need to be looking beyond the inverted pyramid.

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Table 1

First-order Factor Analysis of Readers' Reactions to Treatment Stories

Principal Components Analysis with Varimax Rotation

Item	"Involvement"	"Quality"
On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate how well the article was written?		.84
On the same scale, how fair and accurate was the writing for this article?		.88
How much did you care about what happened in the article?	.65	
How much did you connect the article to other issues or your own experiences?	.75	
How much did reading this article make you want to find out more about issues like this?	.86	
How much did reading this article make you want to get more directly involved in issues like this?	.85	

n= 1203

Note: Factor analysis is one analytical method of identifying underlying patterns in responses, by calculating the correlations among the various items in a group of responses. In this case the calculations yielded two subgroupings, or factors, which we labeled Involvement and Quality.

Table 2
Amount of Story Read by Mode of Writing
By Sex, Age, Education and Newspaper Readership

		Traditional	Narrative	Rad. Clarity	Point of View
	Overall	-.08	.09	.01	-.02
Gender	Male	-.12*	.12*	.03	-.10*
	Female	-.03	.02	.01	.01
Age	21-29	-.18*	.12*	.12*	-.06
	30-64	-.11*	.10*	-.02	.01
	65+	.04	.01	-.01	-.04
Education	Less than HS	-.24*	.11*	.31*	-.17*
	HS grad	-.07	.10*	-.04	.01
	HS grad plus	-.08	.08	.01	-.02
Newspaper Readership	0-3 dys/wk	.01	.08	-.01	-.08
	4-6 dys/wk	-.13*	.09	.38*	-.33*
	7 days/wk	-.06	.08	-.02	.01
# of cells above their subgroup mean		0	5	3	0
# of cells below their subgroup mean		5	0	0	3

Notes:

1) Values are expressed as standardized scores ranging between -1 and 1, where zero is the mean for the subgroup being analyzed in each row.

2) The Overall score for each writing mode, seen in the first row, is based on the Adjusted Mean from Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), in which mode, gender, age, education, and readership were controlled for. In addition, the possible variance due to differences between the cross-section survey setting and the technical-college questionnaire setting was controlled as a covariate. The effects for the subgroups specified in the remainder of the table, the product of one-way analysis of variance, are without additional controls.

3) The entries with asterisks are values that deviate from their row means by more than 5 percent of the total variance, thus suggesting an important, possibly significant, effect.

4) The final two rows summarize the number of "successes and failures" of each writing mode for this dependent variable.

5) n = 1231.

Table 3
Readers' 'Involvement' by Mode of Writing
By Sex, Age, Education and Newspaper Readership

		Traditional	Narrative	Rad. Clarity	Point of View
	Overall	.01	-.10*	.06	.06
Gender	Male	-.06	-.20*	.05	.21*
	Female	.03	-.05	.06	-.04
Age	21-29	.09	.00	.15*	-.26*
	30-64	.02	-.14*	.04	.08
	65+	-.09	-.06	.04	.12*
Education	Less than HS	-.12*	.13*	-.13*	.24*
	HS grad	.14*	-.09	.09	-.13*
	HS grad plus	-.06	-.15*	.08	.12*
Newspaper Readership	0-3 days/wk	.21*	.02	-.21*	-.04
	4-6 dys/wk	.07	-.20*	.34*	-.22*
	7 days/wk	-.06	-.10*	.05	.13*
# of cells above their subgroup mean		2	1	2	5
# of cells below their subgroup mean		1	5	2	3

Notes:

1) Values are expressed as standardized scores ranging between -1 and 1, where zero is the mean for the subgroup being analyzed in each row.

2) The Overall score for each writing mode, seen in the first row, is based on the Adjusted Mean from Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), in which mode, gender, age, education, and readership were controlled for. In addition, the possible variance due to differences between the cross-section survey setting and the technical-college questionnaire setting was controlled as a covariate. The effects for subgroups specified in the remainder of the table, the product of one-way analysis of variance, are without additional controls.

3) The entries with asterisks are values that deviate from their row means by more than 5 percent of the total variance, thus suggesting an important, possibly significant, effect.

4) The final two rows summarize the number of "successes and failures" of each writing mode for this dependent variable.

5) n = 951.

Table 4
Readers' 'Quality' Ratings by Mode of Writing
By Sex, Age, Education and Newspaper Readership

		Traditional	Narrative	Rad. Clarity	Point of View
	Overall	.14*	.03	.00	-.17*
Gender	Male	.02	.08	.06	-.18*
	Female	.23*	.01	-.05	-.18*
Age	21-29	.18*	.21*	-.19*	-.23*
	30-64	.13*	.02	.02	-.15*
	65+	.08	.01	.04	-.13*
Education	Less than HS	.02	.01	.05	-.07
	HS grad	.02	.15*	-.14*	-.02
	HS grad plus	.23*	-.01	.04	-.27*
Newspaper Readership	0-3 days/wk	.15*	.10*	-.21*	-.03
	4-6 dys/wk	.06	.00	.38*	-.44*
	7 days/wk	.18*	.03	-.02	-.19*
# of cells above their subgroup mean		6	3	1	0
# of cells below their subgroup mean		0	0	3	8

Notes:

1) Values are expressed as standardized scores ranging between -1 and 1, where zero is the mean for the subgroup being analyzed in each row.

2) The Overall score for each writing mode, seen in the first row, is based on the Adjusted Mean from Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), in which mode, gender, age, education, and readership were controlled for. In addition, the possible variance due to differences between the cross-section survey setting and the technical-college questionnaire setting was controlled as a covariate. The effects for subgroups specified in the remainder of the table, the product of one-way analysis of variance, are without additional controls.

3) The entries with asterisks are values that deviate from their row means by more than 5 percent of the total variance, thus suggesting an important, possibly significant, effect.

4) The final two rows summarize the number of "successes and failures" of each writing mode for this dependent variable.

5) n = 951.

Table 5
Knowledge from Stories by Mode of Writing
By Sex, Age, Education and Newspaper Readership

		Traditional	Narrative	Rad. Clarity	Point of View
	Overall	-.03	.03	-.01	.02
Gender	Male	-.13*	.03	.01	10*
	Female	.03	.02	-.03	-.03
Age	21-29	-.17*	.20*	.04	-.09
	30-64	.02	-.06	.01	.03
	65+	-.04	.05	-.03	.02
Education	Less than HS	-.43*	.21*	.02	.19*
	HS grad	.07	-.06	-.01	-.01
	HS grad plus	-.05	.05	-.02	.01
Newspaper Readership	0-3 dys/wk	-.03	.16*	.01	-.14*
	4-6 dys/wk	.14*	-.02	-.02	-.12*
	7 days/wk	-.06	.01	-.01	.06
# of cells above their subgroup mean		1	3	0	2
# of cells below their subgroup mean		3	0	0	2

Notes:

1) Values are expressed as standardized scores ranging between -1 and 1, where zero is the mean for the subgroup being analyzed in each row.

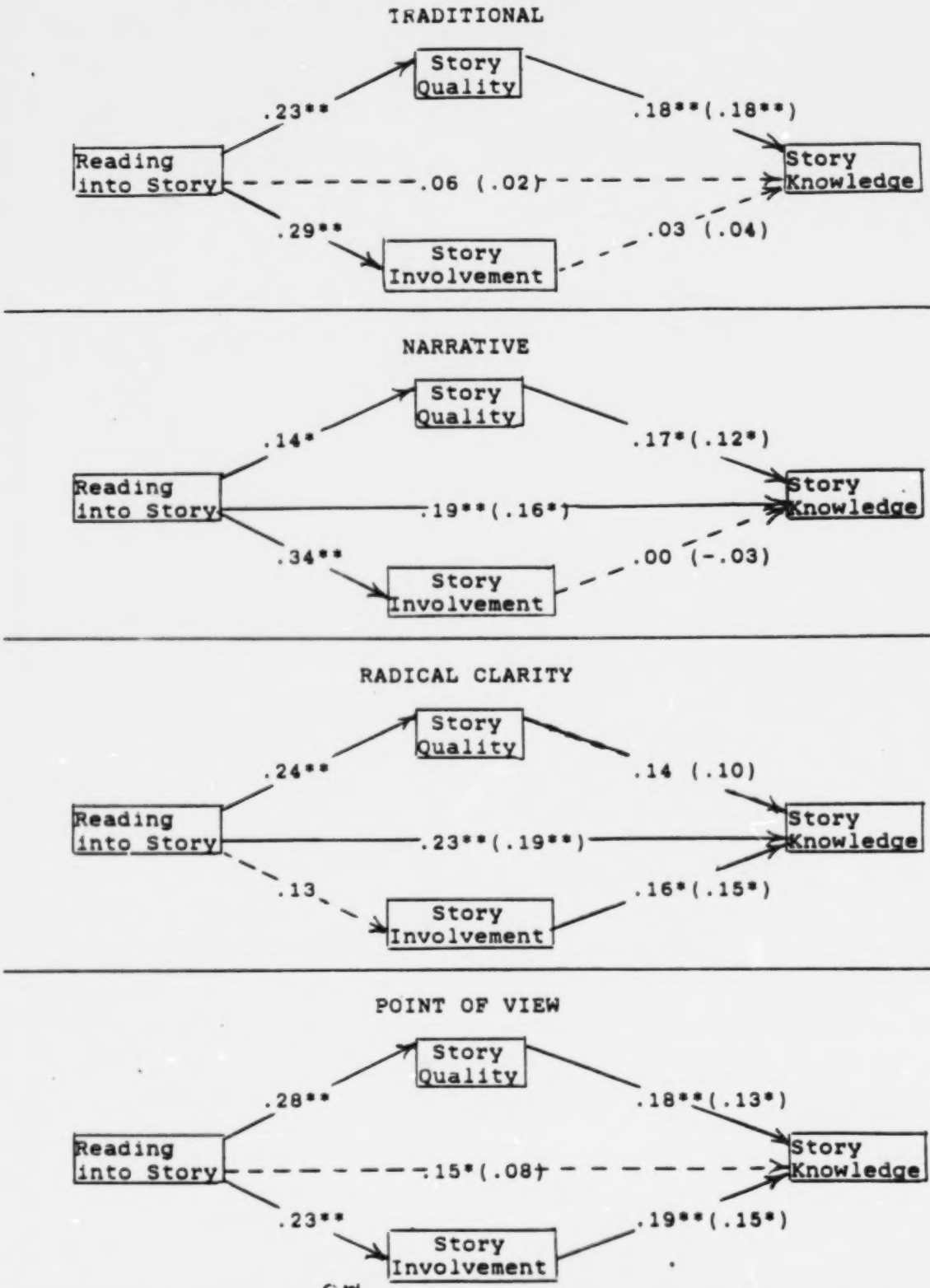
2) The Overall score for each writing mode, seen in the first row, is based on the Adjusted Mean from Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA), in which mode, gender, age, education, and readership were controlled for. In addition, the possible variance due to differences between the cross-section survey setting and the technical-college questionnaire setting was controlled as a covariate. The effects for the subgroups specified in the remainder of the table, the product of one-way analysis of variance, are without additional controls.

3) The entries with asterisks are values that deviate from their row means by more than 5 percent of the total variance, thus suggesting an important, possibly significant, effect.

4) The final two rows summarize the number of "successes and failures" of each writing mode for this dependent variable.

5) n = 1203.

Figure 1
Path Analysis of Routes to Story Knowledge



* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 ( ) = beta after antecedent var. are controlled.

Appendix A: An example of each of the treatment modes

"Nearing the End of the Pinellas Trail" (Day 2)

TRADITIONAL

Two years after the project started, construction of the Pinellas Trail finally has begun in St. Petersburg, ultimately giving city bikers and hikers a chance to travel a popular path already used a million times a year.

Construction of a 7.75-mile section of the trail started last month and should be completed in the summer, project coordinator Frank Aiello said. It's the first segment that will reach into St. Petersburg since the project started in 1990 and the southernmost link in the original trail plan.

"It gives me tremendous joy," said Scott Daniels, president of Pinellas Trails Inc., a non-profit group that has lobbied for the trail since 1988. "We're very excited about the fact we're finally going to have a trail in south county. It definitely will revive spirits in the county and bring neighborhoods together, as it has in north county."

So far, 23.5 miles of trail have been built on abandoned railroad beds, stretching from Tarpon Springs to Seminole, giving joggers, bikers and pedestrians a safe -- and rare -- place to exercise in an increasingly urban area.

The new section in St. Petersburg will cost $1.3 million, coming from a special penny sales tax. Overall, the project will cost $7.4 million. The new span will start in Seminole at Boca Ciega Bay and will dip almost eight miles into the city, ending at 34th Street and the Seventh Avenue S area.

But the new segment does not extend into predominantly black neighborhoods in St. Petersburg, whose residents may need a safe and expansive bike route the most.

Aiello saids the county wanted to extend the trail into black neighborhoods, but could not because the rail beds east of 34th Street still are in use by the CSX railraod company. The city tried bo buy the land but failed, he said.

"We have been working very closely with St. Petersburg officials to explore trail possibilities throughout the city," Aiello said.

One way to extend the trail would be on city streets and through parks.

Daniels said the trail already serves many black neighborhoods in Clearwater,Tarpon Springs and in Largo. "Everybody uses the trail."

In addition to recreation, the trail will boost the economy for the area adjacent to the trail, Daniels and Aiello said.

In Dunedin, for example, several new businesses relocated near the busy path, and home values in the area increased.

"It brings people out of their cars," Aiello said. "It's a people mover."

The Pinellas County Park Department estimates the path has 1 million users a year.

Daniels said the new trail might even ease hurt feeliknqs in St. Petersburg about losing the San Francisco Giants and the empty Suncoast Dome.

"There are a lot of positive things in St. Petersburg," Daniels said. "This is something the city can embrace and be happy about."

Construction of the new segment should take about six months, said Ned Baier, a planner with the Pinellas County Planning Department. The first step is to strip weeds

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and plants that are not native to Florida, clear the site, then level the area. Finally, the asphalt bed will be paved.

Baier said the new trail will start just south of Boca Ciega Bay, but county planners ultimately envision bridging the bay so bikers and joggers can travel the trail without a break.

But Daniels cautioned trail fans not to run out and buy that new pair of sneakers or that expensive bike.

"When people hear about the Pinellas Trail, they think it's coming overnight," Daniels said. "It's a very complicated process."

NARRATIVE

Mike McCullum was negotiating his bicycle around a busy corner on a Sunday afternoon last October when a car turned sharply, hemming him in. He can't shake the mental picture of a bumper brushing his leg.

"Anytime that a 2,000-pound flying wedge of metal is rubbing up against you," McCullum said, "it's going to make you nervous."

That's why McCullum, a St. Petersburg resident and avid cyclist, is so enthusiastic about the extension of the Pinellas Trail from Seminole into St. Petersburg that began last month.

The 7.75-mile segment, set to be finished this summer, will give bike riders, walkers and Rollerbladers a place where they don't have to worry about dodging cars. When the 47-mile asphalt trail is finished, it will stretch from Tarpon Springs to St. Petersburg, covering a strip of ground where railroad tracks used to lie.

"When you're on a trail like that, you get the sense you can slow down and enjoy the sun and the scenery," says McCullum.

The praise is not unanimous, however, Opponents have voiced fears about the trail being a magnet for crime. Others have said the abandoned railroad right of way could be put to better use as a much-needed north-south artery for automobile traffic.

But mostly, the trail is seen as a community bonus. County officials say it prompts new businesses in the neighborhoods it traverses. It's seen as such a plum that some people are left wondering why they can't have it too.

The trail stops just short of many of St. Petersburg's black neighborhoods. County officials say that's because the railroad beds that go through those neighborhoods are still being used and were not available for purchase.

The $1.3 million Seminole-St. Petersburg project will bring to south county the urban oasis that north county residents have been enjoying since parts of th trail opened two years ago. Just as Mike Mucci, a trail regular.

Propping his German-made 10-speed against a fence, the 67-year-old reclines on a park bench at the end of the trail near Seminole City Hall. Afte 2 1/2 hours of pedaling, he is savoring the sunshine and the soft breeze.

The Ohio man, who spends winter in Largo, is a trail convert. Doctor's orders. He rides a few times a week for exercise and was thrilled to hear of the planned extension into St. Petersburg. He finds the trail a tranquil place to pedal his way into his doctor's good graces.

"I go by myself quite a bit, and it's relaxing," Mucci says. "I remember last year, all the flowers coming out. It smelled real pretty."

On a recent day on the trail, a woman clad in a bathing suit and shorts pedals by. Two middle-aged men wearing baseball caps cruise along, talking about their exercise

regimens. It's smooth and flat and peaceful -- great place to try riding your new bike with no hands.

The trail takes you through suburban neighborhoods and snatches of forest. Sometimes the only sound you hear is the click of your bicycle gears and rustling of palmettos in the wind.

But most times you feel the urban buzz. A woman calling her dog. Wind chimes. The drone of traffic. The whine of a circular saw ripping plywood for some home repair project.

Melanie Bush is a trail convert.

Sweat beading on her upper lip and her ponytail swishing in the breeze, she tries out her new Christmas Rollerblades on a portion of the trail in Seminole.

"It's nice riding up and down here," says Bush, 29, of Indian Rocks Beach. "It's smooth and it's safe. It's kind of like being in the country."

RADICAL CLARITY

It is 15 feet wide, 23.5 miles long and about to get longer.

It is used a million times each year and that number is about to increase.

It runs primarily along abandoned railroad beds through much of north Pinellas County and soon will reach into south county.

The Pinellas Trail, the north-south bicycle and pedestrian path that will stretch 47 miles through the county when completed, is coming top St. Petersburg. Construction of the $7.4 million trail began in 1990.

Shortly before Christmas, workers began construction of a 7.75-mile portion of the trail that will start at Park Street and Tyrone Boulevard about a half mile east of the Seminole Bridge, and then wind south and east along an abandoned railroad line to Seventh Avenue S. and 34th Street near Gibbs High School.

Like the rest of the trail, the St. Petersburg leg of the project involves removal of old railroad tracks as well as weeds and plants not native to Florida. The path is being graded to prepare for construction of the riding surface, which consists of several layers of asphalt.

Consultants have recommended asphalt because it is the smoothest surface available and is more flexible if uneven settling occurs in the ground below. Ten feet of the 15-foot-wide path is for bike riding. The reamining five are for walkers.

The work is expected to cost $1.3 million and be complete in June, said Ned Baier of the Pinellas County Planning Department.

The trail now ends north of Boca Ciega Bay in Seminole. Baier said the St. Petersburg segment will start south of Boc Ciega Bay. So trail users must cross the Seminole Bridge near the VA Medical Center at Bay Pines.

Planners envision a separate bridge over the bay so bikers, joggers and people on Rollerblades can have an unbroken path lionking the rest of the trail with St. Petersburg and won't have to tangle with traffic.

North of the bay, the trail runs parallel to Ridge Road and Clearwater-Largo Road. There are breaks near Seminole City Hall and in downtowbn Clearwater, where officials are working to design a route that will pass muster with residents and businesses.

The trail continues through Dunedin and up to Tarpon Springs. More segments are planned, including a route through northeast Pinellas.

Proponents of the trail say it offers a quiet break from the urban sprawl that makes Pinellas the most densely populated county in Florida. They also praise it as an

amenity that adds to the economy and brings together people from different cities and neighborhoods.

However, with the newest segment, the trail will stop short of one community -- the county's largest concentration of black residents in south St. Petersburg. Planners say that's because there were no abandoned railroad beds beyond the point where the trail stops.

Also, opponents have said the abandoned railroad right of way could be put to better use as a much-needed north-south artery for automobile traffic. Others have voiced fears about the trail being a magnet for crime.

But planners say the path is not suitable for a road, and law enforcement officials have reported only sporadic crime aloing the trail.

In 1982, the state began buying segments of the Western Seaboard Coastline Railroad for future transportation use. In 1984, a consultant first suggested using right of ways for a bike path between Clearwater and Seminole. Other lobbyists began urging a countywide path.

In 1989, with money from a one-cent sales tax approved by voters, the Pinellas County Commission bought 35 miles of abandoned track. An additional 12 miles later was puchased.

The trail is used about 1 million times during the year, Baier said. The new segment is expected to increase that number by about $500,000.

POINT OF VIEW

Work began recently to stretch the protected walking and biking path called the Pinellas Trail into St. Petersburg for the first time.

And although it won't be completed before the summer, the slender finger of safety already has poked Iveta Martin in the eye.

The $7.4-million trail, paid for by a penny sales tax, will snake through 47 miles of the county and come to a halt just short of the county's largest concentration of black residents.

Coincidence or design?

County authorities such as planner Ned Baier say it's more coincidence that the latest $1.3 million extension ends west of 34th Street near Seventh Avenue S. That's where they ran out of abandoned railroad bed, which the trail follows and replaces.

Martin sees it a little bit differently: "Why do they always want to end something when it gets to us?" Martin asks. "They keep forgetting that black people want to be safe, too."

Martin is a pharmaicst who lives and works east of the trail's end. She admits the trail is not a panacea that will deliver any great change to a community suffering from too many drugs and not enough jobs. But it *is* being built. The penny sales tax didn't stop at Seventh Avenue and 34th Street S; it was added to each of the millions of dollars her community spent, just as it was in the more affluent areas.

So why should the trail stop there?

Baier's answer, Martin says, is as incomplete as the trail, which still has bridges to build and city traffic to negotiate before it will run unbroken from Tarpon Strpings to St. Petersburg.

"Don't just stop here and say, 'We're not going south because . . .,'" Martin says of the 7.75-mile extension. "Sit down and figure out a way to connect."

Martin's advice came too late for the Greenwood Avenue area in Clearwater, quickly ruled out as the route the trail should take through that city. Baier denies that

race was a factor in choosing where the trail would run. But in a county where racial borders are vividly drawn, the trail's path stretches the definition of coincidence. When the county's two largest black communities stood in the trail's path, planners zigzagged or they stopped.

Few people fail to see the benefits of the trail. It provides a safe, patrolled, often natural environment for exercise and recreational biking, walking, skating and jogging. Its supporters say it also raises property values and brings residents together.

Baier says 1 million people used the trail last year, but he said he has no way of really knowing that. The counting method used could determine only that the trail was used a million times. That could have been 10,000 people using the trail 100 times each, not a far-fetched scenario, because most of the trail users live within a half-mile of it, according to Baier.

That makes the path of the trail -- and the place designers chose to end it -- doubly meaningful to Martin and the community she lives in, where the need for safe bike routes is great.

The secondary benefits of the trail are also needed east of 34th Street. Businesses and property owners coud use the boost. And as Martin and Baier observed, the path could play a role in ridding the southeast side of St. Petersburg of the negative stigma that hangs over it like a cloud. The negative perception of a community often fades when you can see it first-hand, Baier said.

But the likelihood of the Pinellas trail -- even its newest and last expansion -- introducing more of Pinellas County to the much maligned south side of St. Petersburg seems remote.

Baier says plans don't call for carrying the trail any farther. To do so would cost money that won't be easy to raise. Planners, instead, are looking to swing the trail downtown to the waterfront, or to the county's northeast.

Either route would twist the finger that's poking Martin's community in the face.